

identifying component processes for use in provisioning the requested service;

establishing conditions applicable to provision of those component processes;

accessing an updatable data store for storing said conditions when established; and

providing a response to the service request, said response comprising an indication of availability of the requested service;

wherein a service request is processed by accessing one or more of the previously established conditions in the data store, processing the request using the one or more established conditions, and producing said response, and

wherein one or more of said established conditions has an associated expiry time of the one or more conditions itself for storage in the data store.

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47. (Amended) A service provision method for use in distributed processing environments, said method comprising:

receiving a service request;

identifying component processes for use in provisioning the requested service;

establishing conditions applicable to provision of those component processes;

accessing an updatable data store for storing said conditions when established; and

providing a response to the service request, said response comprising an indication of availability of the requested service;

wherein a service request is processed by accessing one or more of the previously established conditions in the data store, processing the request using the one or more established conditions, and producing said response,

wherein one or more of said established conditions has an associated expiry time of the one or more conditions itself for storage in the data store;

wherein:

an expired or undefined condition is detected in the data store,

which condition is applicable to a component process for the provision of a requested service, and

a substitute condition is established in response to said detection.

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48. (Amended) A method as in claim 45 which further comprises initiating one or more of said component processes identified for use in the requested service.

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51. (Amended) A distributed computing environment comprising plural systems, each system being for use in providing services in a distributed processing environment, and each said system comprising:

an input connected to a distributed processing environment for receiving a service request from an entity;

a response output connected to said distributed processing environment for providing a response to the entity;

processing means to process the service request and provide a response thereto and adapted to decide, based at least in part on data held in an updatable data store, whether to provide a service, to propose conditions under which the system is willing to provide a service or to decline to provide a service;

means to access the data store for storing parameter(s) indicative of the available capacity of the system to provide the service; and

wherein said plural systems are connected by a communications network and at least one of said systems is arranged to provide more than one instance of a service, or of a negotiation for a service, to one or more requesting systems concurrently; and

wherein each of said systems is associated with a plurality of organizations, each of said systems having a processing means and means to access stored parameters in the updatable data store in respect of each of its associated plurality of organizations so as to provide a virtual organization.

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54. *Amended* (New) A service provision system as in claim 53 wherein one or more of said established conditions has an associated expiry time of the one or more conditions itself for storage in the data store.

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59. (Amended) A service provisioning method, said method comprising:

using a programmed computer to negotiate with another entity, in response to a request from said other entity, to provide a service,